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USAID Nawiri Learning Brief: Gender Gap Analysis

Background

The gender gap analysis analyzes available information and identifies evidence and knowledge gaps around livelihood systems in the Kenyan Arid and Semi-Arid Lands (ASALs). Peer-reviewed and grey literature on Kenyan ASALs and comparable areas was reviewed. We focus on four thematic areas where evidence on gender dynamics is lacking, areas which have potential relevance to enhance understanding on acute malnutrition in the region.

Summary Findings and Lessons Learned

■ **Theme 1: Sedentarisation, Gender and Nutritional Implications**

Sedentarisation in the Kenyan ASALs can either take the form of people moving closer to or into towns, or of people settling to focus more on cultivation and less on mobile animal husbandry. While both strategies can be a form of livelihood diversification, wealth largely influences the motivations for and outcomes of Sedentarisation.

Poorer households may settle after losing livestock, whereas better-off households may settle some household members to take advantage of emerging opportunities and to spread risk. The literature highlights the difficulty of poor households that have stepped out of pastoralism in finding sustainable livelihoods in pastoral areas (Catley and Akilu 2013).

As with most livelihood strategies, patterns and drivers of sedentarisation are gender specific. Pastoral men who move to towns on a permanent or temporary basis often engage in casual wage labour (Stites 2020), whereas sedentarised women are more likely to engage in small scale income generation activities such as dairy farming, shop keeping, petty trade, wage labour or group collectives (E. Fratkin and Smith 1995; Smith 1997). Women who move to towns or take up cultivation may find they have more control over their income streams and may use these funds to increase schooling for children; patterns which change the ways households function (E. Fratkin and Smith 1995; Giles 2001; Smith 1997). However, a number of authors find that while women may control proceeds from low-value activities such as firewood sales, men are likely to take control of activities if and when they increase in value (Anderson et al. 2012; Tavenner and Crane 2018; Dolan 2001; Smith 1997).

Findings are mixed as to whether settling improves or worsens nutrition, which most likely depends on wealth. One study found that entry into the cash economy didn't improve dietary diversity for women or children (Nestel 1989); a study of settled Turkana women showed nutritional deficiencies in protein intake (Campbell et al. 1999); and a study of the Rendille showed declines in nutritional indicators for children who settled compared to those who did not (E. M. Fratkin, Roth, and Nathan 1999; Nathan, Fratkin, and Roth 1996; Shell-Duncan and Obiero 2000). On the other hand, data on settled Rendille in Marsabit town found that regardless of wealth, child nutrition improved when milk was regularly sold in local markets to buy maize (E. Fratkin and Smith 1995).

Overall, while there is a strong evidence base on sedentarization, the data is generally from twenty to thirty years ago and points to mixed outcomes.

■ **Theme 2: Mobility, Gender and Nutrition**

The mobility of pastoralists in the Kenyan ASALs has drastically decreased compared to preceding generations (Markakis 2004), yet mobility remains essential for herd management and risk mitigation. Decision-making around mobility lies largely with men, and herders move to take advantage of seasonal resources and in response to information on diseases and security conditions. Movement follows patterns established by previous generations and relies on social linkages which may cut across ethnic, territorial and international boundaries (Dyson-Hudson 1966; Gulliver 1955).

Although men make most of the decisions around transhumance, pastoral women and children are also moving (IFAD 2020). Some accompany the herds and engage in gender-specific duties, such as hut construction, food preparation and animal care. Communities also use mobility to manage nutrition and food security. For instance, research in 2007 in Karamoja, Uganda, found that male elders identified those who were nutritionally vulnerable, often pregnant and lactating mothers or malnourished children, and sent them to the cattle camps to ensure better access to animal products (Stites et al. 2007). Young women and young men often travelled between mobile and settled locations with food, supplies and livestock, which helped to smooth consumption and to take advantage of variations in market access. These mechanisms require freedom of movement, and such practices became more difficult to maintain as both insecurity and border restrictions increased (Stites et al. 2007).

Mobility is both central and essential to pastoral and agro-pastoral livelihoods, and child nutrition suffers when access to animals lessens or is cut off (Sadler and Catley 2009; Sadler et al. 2009; Stites and Mitchard 2011). However, there is a lack of data on mobility dynamics in Isiolo and Marsabit Counties and/ or on the gendered and nutritional impacts.

■ **Theme 3: Changing generational and gender roles and possible impacts on nutrition and livelihoods**

Male age-sets are part of the traditional system of governance of numerous pastoral groups (Gulliver, P.H. 1953; P Spencer 1976), but modernization has brought changes to this system, including a weakening of the hierarchical order and growing tensions between male generations (Stites 2013). In addition, the erosion of pastoral livelihoods and increased sedentarisation has reduced the importance of young men as raiders, herders and defenders (Smith 1997). Although females do not inhabit age-sets in the same way as men in East African societies, their roles are also changing due to modernization, greater financial autonomy and increased access to education (Pike 2019; Roth et al. 2001; Giles 2001).

Changes in gender and generational roles have important implications for the management of nutrition and food security. One area of visible change is in decision-making and income-generation, with women becoming increasingly responsible for providing for their households as livestock-based livelihoods, traditionally male controlled, evolve and erode. Women in the Kenyan ASALs are experiencing more financial inclusion and market access, with a greater likelihood of keeping separate control of earnings (Smith 1997). A number of studies point to better nutritional outcomes for children when women control economic resources (Caldwell 2010; Caldwell and Caldwell 1993; Hindin 2000; Koenen, Lincoln, and Appleton 2006; Shen and Williamson 1999), while others suggest negative or negligible effects (Aden et al. 1997; Bradley 1995). However, women's greater involvement in the market economy comes at a cost to women's time, negatively affecting care-giving practices as women engage in income generation on top of their existing domestic and reproductive duties (Waithanji 2008; E Fratkin and Smith 1995). Overall, many societies in northern Kenya are witnessing a shift in control over financial and social assets. Traditional authority systems relied on the control of male elders over livestock (Paul Spencer 1968; Giles 2001). Today, women and younger men can more readily access cash and are increasingly making decisions outside the purview of the elders.

These shifts certainly remain contested (Smith 1997), but little is known about how these gender, generational and power shifts may have affected the underlying factors that influence food security and nutrition.

■ **Theme 4: Customary and kin-based social safety nets and implications for nutrition and food security**

Customary safety nets in pastoral societies entail the redistribution of resources from wealthier to poorer kin, which can diminish dietary differences (Fujita et al. 2004; Elliot Fratkin 1998; Homewood 1992; Grandin 1983; Talle 1988). However, such systems can leave out the most marginalized (Rao et al. 2020). These models are also highly gendered, with men participating in a reciprocal horizontal system based largely upon the exchange of cattle, and women relying on their marital male relatives, natal kin and informal networks of other women (Nduma, Kristjanson, and McPeak 2001). While female-headed households may be marginalized from community-wide safety nets, some literature focuses on the role of female-specific social networks separate from kin or marital-based systems (Khalif and Oba 2018; Aregu and Belete 2007; Shetler 2007).

The traditional social safety nets found in pastoral and agro-pastoral systems do not seem to exist to the same extent in sedentarized communities in northern Kenya. Sedentarisation can increase wealth differences and up-end existing social systems (Smith 1997; Waithanji 2008), weakening redistribution and reciprocal mechanisms. In addition, poorer pastoral families are more likely to settle (Nduma, Kristjanson, and McPeak 2001; E Fratkin and Smith 1995), resulting in a higher proportion of poor households in sedentarized communities. Overall, we do not know how migration, diversification and growing inequity have affected customary safety nets and, in particular, how these changes play out by gender and affect nutritional status. What are the impacts on community cooperation, systems of reciprocity and support to those in need? In 1997, Smith speculated that individualism would increase along with market integration, and that intra-community bonds would suffer (Smith 1997). Twenty-plus years later, the outcome remains a gap in our knowledge.

Applying the Findings and Lessons Learned

- This synthesis points to a number of issues with likely impacts on nutrition in the Kenyan ASALs: changing livelihoods, loss of access to animals, generational shifts and the erosion of traditional safety nets. While we can speak broadly about these themes in arid and semi-arid lands, there is an overall lack of up-to-date evidence on these patterns. This gap analysis calls attention to what we do and don't know about women and these experiences, but largely fails to cover – due to the lack of evidence— the differentiated experiences of men, boys and girls. Importantly, there is very little solid data on how such changes, and the gendered experiences of them, affect the drivers of acute malnutrition in these regions. The study identified numerous evidence gaps around mobility, Sedarisation, changing generational roles and the changing role of traditional systems and social safety nets.

| Key Lessons Learned | Adaptation or implication | Link to the DIP or TOC |
|---|--|---|
| 1. The desk study identified key evidence gaps around the relationship between nutrition and sedentarisation, mobility and changing generational roles in the ASALs | Further research is needed to address these evidence gaps. The qualitative component of the Nawiri longitudinal study is being designed to explore and partially address some of these evidence gaps | Key Research Areas (KRA) 4, 3.2, and 3.1.1.2c DIP Research Areas row 98 |



[See the full Nawiri Gender Gap Analysis on Isiolo and Marsabit Counties, for all sources cited](#)

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